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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this brief report is to highlight information about disabled youth in relation to the second of six National Education goals proposed by the President and the Governors in 1990. The second goal states that "By the year 2000, the high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90 percent." A grade of "improving" has been given to the second goal. Current estimates of dropout rates for students with disabilities indicate that they are dropping out of school at a higher rate than are students without disabilities. Only slightly over 55 percent of students with disabilities complete school, 32 percent dropout, 4 percent are suspended or expelled, and 7 percent reach age limitations. This report then presents the incidence of disabled dropouts returning to school, methods of monitoring school completion and dropout rates, and information that is still needed. (JDD)

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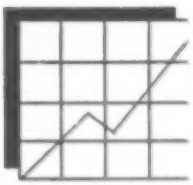
Increasing the High School Graduation Rate

National Education Goal 2 and Students with Disabilities



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BRIEF REPORT
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National Center on Educational Outcomes

The College of Education
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

July, 1992

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National Education Goal 2

"By the year 2000, the high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90 percent."

Objectives:

- The nation must dramatically reduce its dropout rate, and 75 percent of those students who do drop out will successfully complete a high school degree or its equivalent.
- The gap in high school graduation rates between American students from minority backgrounds and their non-minority counterparts will be eliminated.

From: The National Education Goals Report 1991: Building a Nation of Learners (Executive Summary). Washington, DC: National Education Goals Panel

Our nation has been given a grade of **IMPROVING** on the second of the six national education goals proposed by the President and the governors in 1990. But, this grade is qualified with the phrases "more improvement needed" and "better data needed." No information is given on how students with disabilities are faring on this goal.

The purpose of this Brief Report is to highlight what we know about youth with disabilities in relation to Goal 2 of the six national education goals:

- ✓ What are **current school completion and dropout rates** for students with disabilities?
- ✓ Do students with disabilities who drop out **eventually complete** high school or earn an equivalent diploma?
- ✓ How are we **monitoring** the high school completion and dropout rates of students with disabilities?
- ✓ What do we still **need to know**?

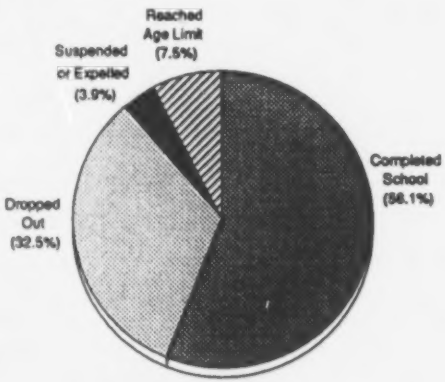
SCHOOL COMPLETION AND DROPOUT RATES

Current estimates of dropout rates for students with disabilities indicate that they are dropping out of school at a higher rate than are students without disabilities.

- ✓ 83% of all students complete school.
- ✓ 78% of students with African American backgrounds complete school.
- ✓ 60% of students with Hispanic backgrounds complete school.
- ✓ 56% of students with disabilities complete school.

Much of what we know about students with disabilities is from the National Longitudinal Transition Study of Special Education Students. This study reported that the national dropout rate for students with disabilities is higher than other national rates typically reported. Further, the dropout rate is slightly lower for students in special education from minority backgrounds than for other students in special education.

Only slightly over 55% of students with disabilities complete school. Others drop out (32%), are suspended or expelled (4%), or reach age limitations (7%).



Source: National Longitudinal Transition Study (Wagner, 1991)

GRADUATION RATES	
Orthopedically impaired	75.1%
Hard of hearing	72.3%
Deaf	71.6%
Visually handicapped	69.5%
Other health impaired	65.4%
Speech impaired	62.7%
Learning disability	60.9%
Mentally retarded	49.8%
Deaf/blind	43.1%
Emotionally disturbed	41.7%
Multihandicapped	32.2%

Source: National Longitudinal Transition Study

Not all students with disabilities are equally likely to complete school. Students with multiple disabilities and students with emotional disabilities are the least likely among those receiving special education services to graduate from school.

Because many students with disabilities age out of school without graduating, but are not dropouts, the dropout rate is not the inverse of the graduation rate. Students with emotional disabilities and students with learning disabilities (accounting for nearly 60% of all students with disabilities) are the most likely among those receiving special education services to drop out of school.

DROPOUT RATES	
Emotionally disturbed	49.5%
Learning disability	32.2%
Mentally retarded	29.9%
Speech impaired	28.3%
Other health impaired	25.2%
Visually handicapped	15.2%
Hard of hearing	14.5%
Multihandicapped	14.5%
Orthopedically impaired	14.4%
Deaf	9.4%
Deaf/blind	7.8%

Source: National Longitudinal Transition Study

DROPOUT RETURNS

Some dropouts do return to school or enter programs to earn the equivalent of a high school diploma. Unfortunately . . .

- ✓ Dropouts with disabilities are much less likely than dropouts from the general student population to continue their secondary education after dropping out.
- ✓ The likelihood of returning to school is greatest in the first two years after students with disabilities drop out, yet completion rates from these second attempts are quite low.

Information from the American Council on Education indicates that some students with disabilities do seek a GED diploma:

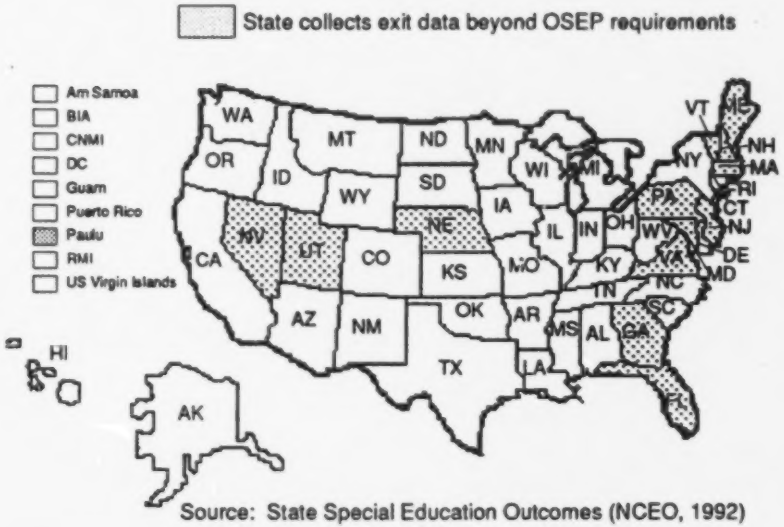
- ✓ Approximately 7% of candidates for GED diplomas have disabilities.

MONITORING SCHOOL COMPLETION AND DROPOUT RATES

Information on graduation and dropout rates for the population of students receiving special education services is currently collected by:

- ✓ The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), which summarizes required data sent to it by states.
  - ✓ Special education data reporting began in 1984.
  - ✓ Revisions in definitions of dropouts, completers, and other exit categories are being considered to make OSEP data comparable to general education data collected by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).
- ✓ The National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS), an intensive longitudinal investigation of the in-school and out-of-school experiences of a nationally representative sample of students in special education.
- ✓ The GED Testing Service, American Council on Education, which monitors the numbers of GED candidates.

All State Departments of Education are required by OSEP to report data on how students with disabilities leave school. Many states collect information beyond that required by OSEP. Most of these states are collecting information on the type of diploma a student receives (regular, special, completion certificate) or the students' reasons for dropping out.



Source: State Special Education Outcomes (NCEO, 1992)

States are using the exit data they collect for more than just providing reports to the federal government. Among the other uses of these data are:

- ✓ **State Legislative Reports** and other reports that document the graduation rates of students with disabilities.
- ✓ **Program Evaluation** to identify effective ways to reduce dropout rates and increase school completion by students with disabilities.

- ✓ **Student Decisions** based on information from tracking systems connected to previous outcomes studies. Some states are identifying students at risk for dropping out of school using statistical predictors such as high absenteeism and poor grades. Some states are following school leavers to better understand their schooling needs.

It appears that our nation is on track in improving its monitoring of the graduation rates of all students. Information from this monitoring, however, points to the great distance our nation has to go to reach National Education Goal 2 for students with disabilities.

Funding priorities now support efforts to address the significant dropout rates among students with emotional and learning disabilities:

- ✓ **Dropout prevention** projects targeted toward middle school students in special education who are at risk of dropping out of school.
- ✓ **Dropout return** projects targeted toward students who had been in special education but left school before completion.

WHAT WE STILL NEED TO KNOW

We now have a good amount of information on the school completion of students with disabilities. There remains a need to achieve **greater consistency** in the meanings of specific terms used by states and by national data collection systems. In addition, there is a need to **improve the quality** of our data through better student identification and tracking systems.

Information Sources

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The National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) was established in October, 1990 to work with state departments of education, national policy-making groups, and others to facilitate and enrich the development and use of indicators of educational outcomes for students with disabilities. The Center represents a collaborative effort of the University of Minnesota, the National Association of State Directors of Special Education, and St. Cloud State University. The Center is supported through a Cooperative Agreement with the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (H159C00004). Opinions or points of view do not necessarily represent those of the U.S. Department of Education or Offices within it.

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